

August 29, 1961

Record of Conversation between N.S. Khrushchev and Kwame Nkrumah

Citation:

"Record of Conversation between N.S. Khrushchev and Kwame Nkrumah", August 29, 1961, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGANI, f. 52, op. 1, d. 556, ll. 51-63. Contributed by Sergey Radchenko and translated by Gary Goldberg.
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/209756>

Summary:

Khrushchev and Nkrumah discuss key international issues, including nuclear disarmament, the German peace settlement, and anti-colonial struggles. Khrushchev urges Nkrumah to take a clear position at the upcoming Belgrade conference, arguing that neutrality is no longer viable given the global tensions and the threat of war.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Blavatnik Family Foundation

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION BETWEEN N. S. KHRUSHCHEV AND KWAME NKRUMAH
29 August 1961

On 29 August 1961 N. S. Khrushchev visited President of Ghana Kwame Nkrumah at his residence on the south coast of Crimea and had a conversation with him. After mutual greetings a discussion developed about the possibility in contemporary conditions of countries observing neutrality in the event of war. At this time Kwame Nkrumah said: we fully understand that we will not be able to remain neutral for, as you have told me, we are essentially in the situation of hostages and will be forced to take a side in the event of such an armed conflict.

N. S. Khrushchev Yes, war in contemporary conditions is not [like] past wars. Now, all peoples, and not only those participating in a fight, will be touched by war as a consequence of the contamination of the atmosphere from the explosions of nuclear weapons. In order to avert a war, it is now necessary, as they say, to change the brains of the imperialists, but this is a difficult matter.

K. Nkrumah Yes, it is necessary, as we say, to conduct a brainwashing, as the Soviet Union does. The current world situation increasingly convinces us that the power of the Soviet Union is the main guarantee of peace.

N. S. Khrushchev Yes, and now this factor will evidently have even greater influence. This is what the imperialists fear.

Yesterday I read a statement of one Western political leader about De Gaulle. He said that De Gaulle supposedly favored unleashing a war as soon as possible, for in the future, he said, the Soviet Union would get even stronger and then the imperialist powers would lose any ability to cope with us. However, I do not believe that De Gaulle actually wants this, for he is not a stupid person and understands that war can only have the destruction of France as its result. Generally speaking, of course, in politics De Gaulle is a serious person.

K. Nkrumah Yes, he is, as they say, somewhat thick-headed [*tverdolobyy*].

N. S. Khrushchev Yes, this is so. In addition, he was raised on memories of the past greatness of France, but it is not great right now. This is the past. France could contend for leadership with Britain, but right now both Britain and France have lost their former importance and it will not return to them.

K. Nkrumah They would like to regain [their] former reputation by restoring their positions in Africa. And they undoubtedly would again seize the continent if there were no Soviet Union in the world. Right now they will not be able to seize Africa through war, for they fear the Soviet Union, knowing what position your country takes with respect to colonialism. Therefore they now talk so much about Afro-European unity. Not so long ago I read an article whose author wrote that Europe is nothing without Africa. From this he draws the conclusion of the need to create an Afro-European union. The idea of the creation of the Common Market is essentially based on this.

N. S. Khrushchev Yes, the imperialists of course understand that if they lose Africa they will finally lose their importance in the world, for Africa is the richest continent, having enormous reserves of mineral and agricultural raw material, and a cheap labor force.

K. Nkrumah Africa is the backbone [*khrebet*] of the Western powers, the foundation of their wealth and their existence.

Taking this into consideration, I would like to talk with you to find out what policy we ought to pursue in Africa about the main international questions. If they give me sufficient time to speak at the conference of heads of neutral countries in Belgrade I will state our position on such problems as disarmament, Berlin, and Germany with all determination. I will essentially repeat everything which N. S. Khrushchev says on all these questions. We have no differences with you in this. I hope that Nehru too will remain faithful to his statements on the German question and the Berlin problem.

N. S. Khrushchev It seems that Nehru has already begun to beat the alarm. Some days ago he again spoke and said something opposite to what he said in a past statement, in particular, as they report, he condemned the GDR for closing the border between East and West Berlin.

K. Nkrumah I expected this and spoke of such a possibility in a past conversation with you. However, I am ready to uphold our position alone in Belgrade.

N. S. Khrushchev Perhaps in Belgrade Sekou Toure and Sukarno will take a firmer position.

The matter right now is such that it is impossible to solve the problem of disarmament without a resolution of the German problem. Of course, when this is done these two problems are not directly connected, and indeed they ought not be tied together. However, the German question is sort of a factor which promotes an increase of tension in the world and requiring an increase of weaponry.

K. Nkrumah Therefore it is first and foremost necessary to solve the German question; otherwise the arms race will continue.

N. S. Khrushchev Yes, but I will repeat that one ought not to tie these two questions together. During the Geneva Summit Conference in 1955 the Soviet government opposed the establishment of such a connection, for which the Western powers had called. We then opposed tying these two questions together inasmuch as the Western powers then brought the question of the reunification of Germany, and not of a peace treaty, to the fore. Now we are already raising the question of the conclusion of a peace treaty so as to preserve the existence of the two German states. When doing this we of course do not openly oppose the unification of the country, but say that this a domestic question which ought to be resolved by the two German states, but it is clear that they will not come to agreement on reunification.

K. Nkrumah Yes, of course, for this question touches on the existence of the different social systems in both countries.

N. S. Khrushchev Yes, this is not a national question, but a social question.

During our past conversation I already spoke of the possibility of discussing the question of Germany in the UN. Now I would like to present our ideas to you on this score in more detail. Personally, I think that President Kennedy would not mind solving the German question, but he cannot say this openly since the opposition is too strong both inside the US as well as among its allies. Here if the neutral countries put pressure on the US through UN channels it would create an opportunity for him to get out of the difficult position in which he finds himself. Then he could explain to the opponent of the conclusion of a peace treaty that it goes counter to the demands of a majority of UN members, but since a majority of UN members are neutral countries, the US cannot ignore public opinion, otherwise they would lose the respect of the peoples of the world and show that they are pursuing an openly imperialistic policy. Therefore right now in the US they fear that a proposal to raise the German question in the UN might appear among the neutral countries in Belgrade. If this were to happen the Western powers would fall into a serious position since the Soviet Union is proposing the conclusion of a peace treaty, but they oppose the signing of such a treaty it is very difficult for them to defend this position of theirs.

Therefore those who are in Belgrade will fight not for the signing of a peace treaty with Germany, but for the reunification of the country, and they will essentially reflect the American position. In favoring the reunification of Germany these representatives will strive to play on the good sentiments of the Africans with respect to self-determination, but applied to Germany. For example they might try to seek the adoption of a resolution in which it was recommended that both sides promote the self-determination of Germany, that is, allowing the Germans to hold a national poll.

K. Nkrumah When in the GDR, I said that no poll was possible if West Germany was in NATO, and East Germany was a member of the Warsaw Pact. So in current conditions such a poll would be senseless inasmuch as the Western powers would not permit holding real elections in Germany.

As regards the reunification of Germany then although I am not speaking about this aloud, I think that peace might be preserved only on the condition of the existence of the two Germanys.

N. S. Khrushchev This is correct. It is also necessary to take into consideration that the slogan of self-determination and reunification is an empty maneuver on the part of the Western powers. One can refer to the actions of the US in Vietnam as an example in this regard, for it is entered in the decisions of the Geneva Conference on Indochina that general elections should be held in Vietnam in two years, but it is the

US which has been obstructing holding such elections up to the present time.

The Americans also act in the role of opponents of the unification of Korea on the basis of general elections.

Or recall the actions of the US in Guatemala, when a democratic government came to power in this country. They sent troops to Guatemala and overthrew this government by force.

Cuba is also an excellent example of the US's real attitude toward the self-determination of peoples.

Just now in Brazil President Quadros resigned under pressure and power there was seized by a former minister of defense, who declared that if the Vice President of Brazil, who is abroad right now, returned to the country he would be arrested, although according to the Constitution this Vice President should become head of state in the event of the resignation of the President.

Here is the genuine attitude of the US toward self-determination, toward independence.

K. Nkrumah Right now the entire Latin American continent is beginning to endorse the general progressive movement, and the imperialists are fighting this.

N. S. Khrushchev What the imperialists have done in Brazil is a crazy act. This only adds fuel to the fire.

K. Nkrumah Yes, it can only worsen the position of the imperialists.

N. S. Khrushchev Returning to the Belgrade Conference, I would like to again say that if the neutral countries raise the question of discussing the German question at the UN with the goal of influencing the opponents of the conclusion of a peace treaty with Germany, this will be a useful thing for peace and allow the US to get out of a difficult position while preserving its prestige.

Britain agrees with the need to solve the German question. Right now a big fuss has been raised in the world press about Macmillan's statement; when talking with correspondents, he declared that Britain would not fight on account of Berlin. In newspapers they discuss the question of how to understand Britain's position, that is, one the one hand, the fact that British government is taking steps of a military nature, and on the other, the head of this government declares that his country will not fight on account of Berlin. Diplomatic observers explain that Britain is going to increase its military potential under pressure of West Germany, France, and the US. But this scared the British people, and therefore Macmillan also made such a statement, which essentially made all the measures of a military nature being adopted by Britain null and void.

Thus, the neutral countries would play an exceptionally useful role if they intimidated the Western powers by raising the German question at the UN and recommending, first, signing a peace treaty with Germany and, second, recognizing the FRG and GDR legally, and third, admitting both German states to the UN.

Such a recommendation could be convincingly justified to public opinion inasmuch as a peace treaty would lead to a final solution of the question of the borders of Germany with Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the Soviet Union, which would eliminate the last vestiges of the Second World War and clear the horizons of the storm clouds which have now settled over the world and threaten to erupt with the thunderstorm of war.

Legal recognition of the two German states would stabilize their situation and leave the German revanchists who are gathering [their] forces against the GDR without a leg to stand on.

The admission of both German states to the UN would also lead to an increase of stability in Europe and in the entire world.

All these measures are needed in order to cleanse the atmosphere in the world, eliminate the tension in Europe, and create the conditions to solve the main problem, disarmament.

At one time Edgar Faure, the Prime Minister of France, proposed that, in the event of general disarmament, to allocate 10% of the money freed up as a result of

disarmament to economic aid to the underdeveloped countries of Asia and Africa. The Soviet Union supported this proposal then, and we indeed support it right now. This money would constitute an enormous sum which could be directed to economic aid to the countries of Africa and Asia to improve their economies and culture.

So if all these questions were solved this would be a great blessing for the underdeveloped countries of the world, and indeed for those countries which spend enormous sums for weapons, since they too would be able to raise their economies to a higher level. This would be a great victory for all peoples, for it would free them from the burden of weapons and allow them to direct all their energies to improve [their] welfare.

This would also mean the assurance of a durable peace. So this is a very attractive position for all countries, especially the former colonial peoples. An initiative in this question will have the same attractiveness for the peoples of the world as the proposal of the Soviet Union introduced at the past UN session about the elimination of colonialism. For this is a noble question common to all humanity, the question of strengthening peace and freeing people from the fear of war.

I am confident that even President Kennedy would be satisfied with such a formulation of the question, although of course a big fuss would be raised in the press. However, this would provide him an opportunity to solve this question without damage to the prestige of the US. Right now Kennedy needs some kind of support so that he is not accused of cowardice, that he was frightened. A favorable solution to the German question from positions of reason would not only not damage the prestige of the US but, on the contrary, would promote a growth of this prestige.

The question is acute right now: peace or war. There is no third alternative. If good sense triumphs there will be peace, if madness takes over, there will be war. Thus, if you raise these questions in Belgrade which urgently require their solution this will be in the interests of all peoples. I think that Nehru will support us since he has no other choice. Only those representatives of the African countries which have finally sold out to the colonizers can oppose these proposals and, of course, there are such people in Africa.

K. Nkrumah But they will not listen to these people. It will be hard for them to openly oppose these proposals.

N. S. Khrushchev That is why it is hard; if they openly oppose these proposals they will finally expose themselves in the eyes of the peoples. As in a mirror, the true position of a particular government figure is reflected in the German question.

Why does De Gaulle, for example, so vehemently oppose the conclusion of a German peace treaty? Yes, it is because he is waging a war in Algeria right now, but in the event of the signing of a peace treaty and the solution to the German problem he can't sit in Algeria. Then the anti-popular, rapacious nature of the war France is waging in Algeria would be visible with even greater clarity.

Right now De Gaulle's bureaucrats are suggesting the idea to us that De Gaulle might change his anti-Soviet position on the German question if the Soviet Union in turn changed its position on Algeria and Tunisia. But I said to De Gaulle when we talked about the colonial question in Paris that this question should be finally solved on the basis of the elimination of colonialism. The Soviet Union cannot take another position. Not for nothing is it said, "You are my friend, but truth is my mother". We cannot seek a compromise with colonialism. De Gaulle then said to me that he understood this.

At a reception in Paris he brought Algerians and Africans over to me, striving to show that they were friendly to France, and indeed they said themselves that they loved De Gaulle and loved France. I then responded to them that I see this, however the peoples of Africa and Algeria were exhibiting another attitude; otherwise, who was it then who was fighting in Algeria.

In 1956 when Guy Mollet, the leader of the French Socialists and then also Prime Minister of France, and C. Pineau, Minister of Foreign Affairs, were in the Soviet Union there was a Senegalese senator in their delegation who also tried in every way to show his loyalty to France. But the days of such figures are numbered who obediently carry out the will not of their peoples but of the colonialists, and in the end the African peoples themselves will hang them.

K. Nkrumah This time is approaching and this has to occur.

N. S. Khrushchev On the whole it needs to be said that the international situation is developing well right now.

On Sunday I told you that on 1 September a test of a nuclear weapon will be held in the Soviet Union, which will be announced in a special document.

K. Nkrumah I will also talk about this in Belgrade, for it is not excluded that voices will be heard that the Soviet Union has broken the word it has given about a cessation of tests. I will reply to this that, in spite of the existence of such an agreement, France is conducting tests in the Sahara. But France is in NATO. And none of the parties to this agreement have called for it to cease these tests.

N. S. Khrushchev None of them have even condemned France for this.

K. Nkrumah So if France can conduct tests in the name of NATO, then why cannot the Soviet Union conduct tests[?] I will openly speak about this in Belgrade.

N. S. Khrushchev It is also necessary to take into consideration that the Soviet Union is resuming the testing of nuclear weapons in conditions when it is threatened with war if it signs a peace treaty with Germany. In addition, it is known that the Soviet Union has proposed a treaty for general and complete disarmament which would provide for the prohibition of the testing of nuclear weapons. But the Western powers stubbornly do not want to accept this proposal.

If the proposal of the Soviet Union to conclude a peace treaty with Germany were accepted then we would not have any motives to begin nuclear testing. However, in response to our proposals about a solution of the German question the Western powers have announced a military mobilization and are conducting other measures to prepare for war. In the face of such actions the Soviet Union has no other choice except to adopt all the necessary measures to strengthen its defense capacity.

The conversation between N. S. Khrushchev and President of Ghana Kwame Nkrumah ended with this. K. Nkrumah invited N. S. Khrushchev to have lunch with him.

The conversation was recorded by V. Sukhorukov.

4ng 30 August 1961